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## Letters

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## Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021



### Authors

Stephen Schaper, Diana Lynne Pavlac, Jorge Quinonez, Loretta Gallagher, Betty J. Irwin, Bob Acker, and David Doughan



Stephen Schaper

Britt, IA

*Mythlore* is great. Occasionally I might have disagreements of opinion with the views of some of the writers, but everything is of the highest quality and getting better, it seems, as time goes on. "They seem a bit above my likes and dislikes, so to speak". Well, not really, but I doubt I am competent enough as a scholar to comment on them in that fashion. Perhaps, in time, I can put something together on the Music. It seems to be a real phenomenon in the fractal structure of the universe. (Symphony, not 'chaos!'). I think in agreement with Mary Stolzenbach's comments. There is also a place in the Scriptures that refers to the 'morning stars singing together'. And now we find out that stars indeed are resonating with sonic vibrations, though I can't say for sure whether they are related. The artwork is superb!, especially the last two issues, the color was great, but I am especially fond of the cover art in *ML51*. Too bad Ballantine doesn't draw upon Society artists for the calendar, 'twould be far better if they did. I see that one of my suggestions has been implemented! The index of back issues. I shall make use of it. Thank you! I have a friend writing a book on heroism, who was previously unfamiliar with mythopoetic works tying in. I shall glean out relevant materials from *Mythlore* and Purtillo's book which includes *Hobbits and Heroism*, and *Beyond Heroism*.

Diana Lynne Pavlac

Chicago, IL

In the midst of all my difficulties, I have finally found time and space enough to sit and enjoy *ML51*. I do want to emphasize how appealing this issue of *ML* is! I was most impressed by the variety in articles: from the historical to the liturgical to the literary, scientific, and linguistical, this *ML* skipped through a wondrous array of approaches and styles. In overall design, this issue also is a standout. As I have mentioned to you before, I value consistency (in typeface, print size, picture placement, and all the rest) above nearly every other virtue in layout. The article that had the most power to inform and delight was the absolutely marvelous index to *Mythlore*. What a fine bit of work! And what an inspiration to those who write, or would write, to those who draw, or would draw. And what a tribute to those who have labored so persistently to produce this journal. Praise and thanks to you and your excellent staff.

Jorge Quinonez

San Diego, CA

Another fine issue: excellent articles and artwork. I have a couple comments about *Mythlore* LII.

"Sauron and Dracula" was quite thorough in its analysis of Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings*. Still, Gwenyth Hood would have done well if he had included *The Silmarillion* in his study. The paper

missed the important point (which Patrick Wynne did not in his fine illustration of Sauron in vampire-form) that Dracula and Sauron (at least before the downfall of Numinor) were shape-changers. If I remember Stocker's book correctly, both Dracula and Sauron could change into wolves or bats. Also, the messenger of Sauron was a vampire herself: Thuringwethil.

Tom Loback's "Thingol Scroll" was interesting (especially if you tried to translate some of the Cirith in the illustrations) and well researched. I would love to see more of his artwork printed in *Mythlore*. Keep up the good work!

Loretta Gallagher

Washington Crossing, PA

I am a former member of The Fellowship and I just had to write to you and let you know that I must admit to almost being glad of the dissolution of that society, since I might never have known of The Mythopoeic or *Mythlore*.

I've been a *LoTR* fan for years and now you've introduced me to C.S. Lewis (I've found some of his works and so far enjoy him almost as much as Tolkien) and Charles Williams (I can't seem to find any of his books so far but am still researching).

I am sincerely impressed with *Mythlore*... the writing is beautiful (you've obviously attracted all the most talented essayists in the world!) and the artwork is spectacular (perfect for the subject!). I can't say enough about how enthralled I am! So please keep up the good work and thank you for all the enjoyment you provide.

Betty J. Irwin

Athens, GA

I was delighted to find my article, "Archaic Pronouns in *The Lord of the Rings*," in the Autumn 1987 issue of *Mythlore*. But, alas, one word was omitted from the last line of the first paragraph, and while this does not change the point of the article, it does indicate I'm perhaps a slow reader!

[The sentence should read: "All of these words give the book an archaic flavor *without* making the prose difficult to read." Our apologies for this error. --Ed.]

Bob Acker

Des Moines, IL

Gene Hargrove's article "Who is Tom Bombadil" in *Mythlore* 47 is extremely plausible and well reasoned, but a number of his points are subject to more than one interpretation. I would like to explore some of these alternatives.

Following his introduction, Hargrove discusses the

difference between an enigma (as Tolkien described Bombadil) and an anomaly (as some readers considered him). However, knowing how carefully Tolkien used the English language we should consider more carefully what he meant by stating Tom was an enigma. As Hargrove notes, enigma has the general meaning of mystery, puzzle or riddle. My Webster's Collegiate gives a second definition as something inexplicable. Furthermore, in discussing synonyms it points out that an enigma hides its meaning but that a riddle is definitely proposed to be guessed. *The Hobbit* showed us that Tolkien was very familiar with riddles so we might conclude that when he states that Tom is intentionally an enigma, that he was stating that Tom's origin was inexplicable.

Hargrove next discusses Tolkien's general approach to problems which was to reconsider them until he came up with an explanation and suggests that he may have left clues that would make Tom a riddle rather than an enigma. This is certainly possible and it remains to examine these clues and see if they support the thesis that Tom's origin is explicable.

It is next pointed out that if the claim that Goldberry is the River-woman's daughter is accepted it must lead to a different theory about the origin of Tom (and Goldberry). Hargrove states that he considers this claim to be a cover story invented to deceive the Hobbits as to the true origin. He does not give any reason for considering it to be a cover story, but if we are to accept the theory that Tolkien planted clues that would enable the readers to solve the riddle of Tom's origin he would have to have left a clue to indicate that the River-woman was really a cover story.

There is no doubt that the River-woman was considered real when *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil* was published in 1934 as this was before the Hobbits had even been thought of. Tolkien put this poem into the context of a Hobbit legend about Bombadil in his introduction to the collection of poems in *The Tolkien Reader*, Ballentine 1966. Thus if there is to be any clue to the idea that the River-woman is a cover story, they would have to be looked for in the *LotR*.

The River-woman is mentioned only once in *LotR* (I-168, Ballentine). In the song that Tom is singing when first heard by the Hobbits he calls Goldberry "River-woman's daughter." Later (I-175), Tom specifically denied that he knew the Hobbits were nearby when he was busy singing that song. From then on Goldberry is described only as the river-daughter. It requires very devious reasoning to conclude from this that the River-woman is a cover story. My conclusion is that Tolkien having created the River-woman in 1934 retained her in the *LotR*. This specifically rules out the idea that Goldberry could be a Valier of similar spirit, but does not rule out the idea that Tom and the River-woman could be of the Valar or their relatives.

Hargrove next discusses at length the idea that Tom is a nature spirit. While the main textual basis for this may be the discussion of Tom at the council of Elrond, it can be supported by two statements by Tolkien in *Letters*. Specifically "Tom Bombadil the spirit of the (vanishing) Oxford and Berkshire countryside" (p. 26) and "Goldberry represents the actual seasonal changes in such lands" (p. 272). Finally, I think the earth spirit idea is supported by Tom's statement (I-182) "Tom was here already.... He knew

the dark under the stars when it was fearless -- before the Dark Lord came from Outside." Hargrove discusses this statement later and concludes it indicates that Tom could be one of the Valar.

When *The Silmarillion* describes the coming of the Valar to Ea (p. 20) it is stated "but Melkor too was there from the first." If Tom was there "before the Dark Lord came from Outside" he could not have been a Valar. This is not completely conclusive because Melkor later was driven away for awhile and later came in from Outside a second time. Possibly Tom could have referred to this second entrance but the reasoning is again devious and I would say the statement tends to support the idea that Tom is an Earth-spirit rather than a Vala.

After this, Hargrove discusses other evidence that Tom might be a Maia or a Vala. In general the points are well taken. I might note that the story of the otter's whisker from the Elder Edda was described by Tolkien (*Letters*, p. 319) as just a "donnish detail" and a "private pleasure" so I doubt it reflects significantly on Tom's nature. Also the discussion of how Tree-beard and Tom can both be the oldest does not rule out the idea that Tom is an earth spirit.

Incidentally, Foster in the original *A Guide to Middle Earth* stated it was possible that Tom was a Valar, apparently he changed this to a Maia in the later *Complete Guide*.

There is no perfectly conclusive proof that Tom cannot be a Vala so the remaining item to be discussed is Hargrove's identification of Tom as Aule. I think we have to accept the River-woman's daughter story, so Goldberry cannot be Yavanna, but her mother could be of the Valar or Maiar.

It seems to me that Tolkien's descriptions of Tom as a pure natural scientist rule out his being Aule. True, Aule was not possessive but he was a workaholic engineer who continually applied his wide knowledge of science to the making of things -- he created the dwarves and taught smith craft to the Noldor. While Tom mentions "making" as one of his activities (I-200) "I've got things to do" he said "my making and my singing, my talking and my walking and my watching of the country", it doesn't seem to be an all consuming passion as it was with Aule.

My candidate, if Tom is to be considered a Vala is Tulkas. Tulkas was always laughing whether in spirit or in war, was not a good counselor but a hardy friend. While capable of great wrath when contending with Melkor he was not a berserker like Orome, who fought in a cold rage, but a happy warrior who preferred wrestling to weapons. We could well have renounced fighting after being frustrated in his chase after Ungoliant and Melkor.

What cannot be readily explained if Tom is to be considered a Valar is what happened to his original wife. Only Ulmo of the great Valar was unmarried and since he was still in the ocean at last report could hardly be Tom.

Hargrove considers Tom's reaction with the ring to be evidence that he is a Valar. Rather than Tom having power over the ring, it seems more like Gandalf says (I-348) at the council of Elrond "Say rather that the ring has no power over him." Tom made the ring vanish by mere sleight-of-hand and otherwise it did not affect him. I wouldn't be too sure that Valar



would be unaffected by the ring. the Maiar certainly were, and the Maiar were "of the same order as the Valar but of less degree" (S-30). As an earth-spirit Tom would be of an entirely different order than the Valar and the ring's lack of influence over him is not surprising.

If the River-woman is to be considered a Valar or one of the Maiar, I think it is more likely she is a Maiar. This is because one other Maiar, Melian, is known to have had a child but no Valar is said to have had offspring. Of the Maiar we know very little but Uinen, the spouse of Osse lived in the water. After the destruction of Numenor she may have lost interest in the seas and retired to the Withywindle and become the River-woman.

Hargrove concludes his discussion with an evaluation of Aule's motives and his morality if he is considered to be Tom. It is all quite logical if you can accept that Aule is Tom. This is really well reasoned and it would be great if this is what Tolkien really intended. However, because of specific statements made in the *LotR* and *Letters*, I can see only a remote possibility that Tom was to be identified with Aule.

To summarize, I think we must consider the following points:

1. When Tolkien called Tom an enigma, he very likely used the meaning of enigma as inexplicable; for Tom was a riddle to be solved Tolkien might have said so.
2. There are no clues to indicate that the River-woman was a cover story set-up to deceive Hobbits. Since Tom sang about her when he didn't know the Hobbits could hear, he must have known she existed. Therefore Goldberry cannot be a Valier.
3. There are several statements that support the idea that Tom was an earth-spirit. Tolkien specifically called him "the spirit of the.... countryside" in a letter.
4. Since Tom was on earth before the Dark Lord and Melkor arrived with the first of the Valar, it is unlikely that Tom could be a Valar.
5. If Tom is a Valar it is unlikely that he is Aule. Aule was an applied scientist or gifted technician while Tom described by Tolkien as a natural scientist just interested in acquiring knowledge not applying it.
6. Tom did not have power over the ring -- it had no power over him. This could well be because he was something entirely different from the Valar or Maiar.
7. If the River-woman is to be considered a Valier or Maia, the one that lived in the water was the Maia Uinen.

David Doughan

London, England

I was delighted to read Peter Schakel's perceptive article on Lewis and Orwell (in #50), so much so that I am moved to make the following comments.

I think Mr. Schakel has it slightly wrong about Lewis and Orwell's generation, and more seriously wrong about their social class. True, Orwell was born only 5 years later than Lewis, but it was an important

5 years, which meant that Lewis (like Tolkien) served in the Great War, and Orwell did not. As for class: any Etonian, even a "scholar" like Orwell, is automatically in a far more exalted world than an alumnus of all but a tiny handful of "public" schools (which do not include Malvern College). (Relatively) impoverished Orwell's background may have been, but he was still brought up among the ruling class -- not, like Lewis, merely the commercial/professional middle class. Throughout his life, Orwell's circle of acquaintance included many from this same upper class, even though he came fairly early in life to reject the class and its right to govern. Lewis' friends and colleagues were (socially) just not in the same league.

Orwell did indeed spend much of his life living hand-to-mouth, but this was as the result of a conscious decision. He "dropped out" as effectively as any of the Hippy Generation, and spent some time among other dropouts, down-and-outs, vagrants and others not of the working class proper, but who were on the margins of society. This is fairly typical of upper-class dropouts; what was more unusual was that Orwell came to identify more with the respectable, "decent" English working class and its solid, conventional aspirations -- though still always (and consciously so) as an outsider. Working class characters are as infrequent in his books as they are in Lewis'; the typical Orwell hero is of the lower middle class, or even Orwell's own "shabby genteel" class. In fact, like Lewis (and many other contemporary intellectuals), Orwell in his own life cultivated a sort of respectable shabbiness -- an apparent indifference to fashion, style and effete elegance. The main difference here is that where Lewis finds an expression (highly sentimentalized) of solid, stable, decent values in the rural, "gentle" dominated image of Cure Hardy, Orwell expresses these qualities through an equally sentimentalized representation of urban working class life. Ironically, the chief impression left by both is one of a rather stultifying cosiness.

Other recurrent features both have in common include a disdain for/mistrust of "the intelligentsia", especially that of the political left -- Fairy Hardcastle's strictures on "the people who read the high-brow weeklies" (*That Hideous Strength*, p. 100) could almost have come out of an *As I Please* column. There is also a strain of misogyny running through the writings of both men -- more blatantly in Lewis, but more pervasively in Orwell, whose "progressivism" did not apply to his sexual politics, except in a macho-Freudian sense. At least Lewis changed his outlook on women in his later years; *Till We Have Faces* does much to make up for *The Shoddy Lands*. No such repentance is apparent in Orwell.

Finally, there is the curious "Englishness" of the 1940s -- a heightened consciousness of Englishness which affected so many and such varied artists in such different ways: some of Noel Coward's songs, Powell and Pressburger's films, Eliot's *Four Quartets*, Lewis' *That Hideous Strength*,... and the fact that, as A.N. Wilson puts it, "Hitler's war was rather the era of Anglicanism" (*Love Unknown*, p. 33). However, Anglicans were not alone in this; Orwell, in a whole series of essays, of which the best known is *The Lion and the Unicorn*, tried to analyze and define what was peculiarly English, and constructed a stereotype of the English not very far removed from Lewis' of Britain. although perhaps even he was an Anglican at heart. In 1935 he had written:

Continued on page 62

Denethor, like Boromir, saw his duty as the highest good-but dependent solely upon his own prowess.

"You think, as is your wont, my Lord, of Gondor only," said Gandalf. "Yet there are other men and other lives, and time still to be. And for me, I pity even his [Sauron's] slaves."<sup>23</sup>

It is a mistake to study too closely the arts of the enemy. Like Saruman, Denethor falls in trying to wrest knowledge and cunning from the very thought of Sauron, a match too great for any free being alone. He is misled by Sauron's own devices. Seeking mastery rather than aid, command rather than counsel, he despaired of victory when no hope in strength remained.

.....

Tolkien could not ignore the power of the Northern battle-ethic, the courage and fierce loyalty of thane for lord. But as a Christian, neither could he leave untouched the pagan's bleak prospect for the afterlife.

In his mythopoeic creation of a secondary world, Tolkien engendered a true community of free peoples. Elves, dwarves, men, ents, hobbits -- even old Tom Bombadil -- stand united to serve the *wyrd* of Iluvatar (wittingly or no) under the Valar's regency. After all, all are Erusen, children of Eru; and to serve the good of the free peoples is to serve the will of Iluvatar Himself.

#### NOTES

- 1 III:93. References to the text of *The Lord of the Rings* are in the format of volume and page number for the first edition of the Ballantine paperback: Roman numeral I for *The Fellowship of the Ring*, II for *The Two Towers*, and III for *The Return of the King*; Arabic numbers for pagination.
- 2 J.R.R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984), p. 23.
- 3 J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories" in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984), p. 144.
- 4 Philippians 4:8 (New International Version).
- 5 III:286.
- 6 J.R.R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984), pp. 18,22.
- 7 Quotations below from *Beowulf*, *Finn and Hengest*, and *The Battle of Maldon* will not be attributed by line number. Translations are the writer's, with help in *Finn and Hengest* from J.R.R. Tolkien, *Finn and Hengest: The Fragment and the Episode*, ed. Alan Bliss (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1983), p. 147.
- 8 Pagan Greek proverb cited in 1 Corinthians 15:32 (New International Version).
- 9 Emphasis is the writer's.
- 10 J.R.R. Tolkien, "Ofarmod," Part III in "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhtelm's Son" in *The Tolkien Reader* (New York: Ballantine, 1968), p. 20 (A).
- 11 I recommend Dick West's Mythcon XVIII paper, "Turin's Ofarmod: Heroes Are Dangerous to Have

Around," which discusses the fated character of Turin Turambar ("turin umbartanen") in the settings of *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales*. I will here confine my remarks to references in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

- 12 Robert Boenig, "Tolkien and Old Germanic Ethics," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, General Fantasy and Mythic Studies*, Winter 1986, p. 10.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 I:429, 428.
- 15 I:430.
- 16 II:433.
- 17 II:434.
- 18 III:141.
- 19 III:141.
- 20 King Alfred's Old English Version of Boethius, ed. W.J. Sedgfield (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 128 [Shippey's translation].
- 21 T.A. Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), p. 114.
- 22 Randel Helms, *Tolkien and the Silmarils* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), p. 46.
- 23 III:105.



## Mythlore Art Portfolio

Over the years *Mythlore* has published a large amount of highly praised fantasy artwork. Few people are inclined to cut up their issues of *Mythlore* in order to frame these pieces for their walls. Therefore, *Mythlore* has begun a series of portfolios reproducing various pieces on quality paper suitable for framing. A limited number of portfolios are now being offered containing copies signed and numbered by the artists.

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- "The Mistress of the Silver Moon" (MacDonald) by Nancy-Lou Patterson (from *Mythlore* #21)
- "Till We Have Faces" (Lewis) by Patrick Wynne (from *Mythlore* #39)

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LETTERS, continued from page 54

"A happy vicar I might have been  
Two Hundred years ago..."

and, as Peter Schakel points out, he chose to be buried in a graveyard. A closet Anglican? Who knows what might have happened had he not died early of T.B.? If he had lived to meet Lewis in, say, 1958?